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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of ego-switch, reported by many bilinguals as the perception that they have a different personality associated with each of their languages, is examined. In a study involving a sample of 252 white South African students who spoke English and Africaans, subjects were administered psychological tests and a questionnaire on their language background. While 40 percent of the subjects reported no ego-switch, the remainder reported either ego-diffusion or a more complete form of ego-switch. The subjects who reported ego-diffusion described it in terms of being inept and less able to express themselves when using their second language. Those reporting the more complete form of ego-switch consciously perceived themselves as having a separate personality for each language and viewed this as a normal and positive phenomenon. Possible explanations for ego-switch include differences in language proficiency, differences in the cultural milieu in which each language is used, and differences in awareness of paralinguistic phenomena such as gestures and body cues. Other possible factors involve (1) elaborated versus restricted modes of language use, (2) compound versus coordinate bilingualism, (3) integration of speech and kinesic communication channels, and (4) ego-switch as a function of feedback variation. (RW)

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BILINGUALISM AND SELF-CONSTANCY: A STRUCTURAL APPROACH

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INTRODUCTION

For a number of years, I have been interested in a psychological phenomenon reported by many bilinguals, namely the fact that they feel as if they have two personalities, one associated with the speaking of each of their languages. For the sake of brevity, I shall refer to their sense of dual identity as ego-switch (ES).

Erickson (1959), in discussing the adolescent crisis of identity, writes of the need for the individual to perceive himself as 'the same' in spite of changes brought about by physical growth, sexual maturation and changing role expectations. This task can be stated in Piagetian terms as the need to develop a personality structure such that the individual can perceive himself as constant through various reversals and transformations - to acquire self conservation.

The state of being bilingual probably both helps and hinders the development of such a personality structure. The assimilation of a culture is accomplished in large measure by the acquisition of its language. A bilingual has available, by virtue of his assimilation of two cultures, two ways to present and to view himself. It follows that the bilingual's perception of self is subject to transformations which are unavailable to the monolingual. If these transformations are symmetrical or reciprocal, the individual may well be able to develop and maintain a stable, unitary sense of self. If, however, the transformations are asymmetrical or no transformations between the systems are possible, it may be much more difficult for the individual to acquire self-constancy.

Several questions can be raised about the potential outcomes of these processes. 1) Because of the greater possible variety of self-transformations, has a bilingual the potential for more highly differentiated ego-functioning than does a monolingual? 2) If, however, these transformations remain unintegrated, does not the bilingual also have a greater potential for ego-diffusion? 3) Is it possible that instead of eventuating in one integrated self-system, the differences in feedback between the two language systems are of such an organized nature that, for the bilingual, two separate self-structures are produced?

Preliminary Study of Ego-Switch

Several years ago I had an opportunity to investigate the phenomenon of ego-switch in the context of white South African society. The population studied was a sample of 252 white South African students. One group spoke Africaans, a descendant of 17th century Dutch, as their home language. The other sample was made up of students whose home language was English. All subjects were administered a series of psychological tests and responded to a questionnaire about

their language learning background. An ego-switch score was computed based on an ego-switch scale and correlated with a number of factors hypothesized to be connected in some way with report of a sense of changing personalities when languages are switched.

Data from the questionnaires in the Johannesburg study were used to divide bilingual subjects into three types on the basis of ego-switch reports. First there are those who do not report ego-switch at all. They constitute about forty percent of the sample. The remaining sixty percent are the positive ego-switch subjects and this group can be divided into two sub-types.

The majority of the ES group can be described as showing an incomplete form of ES, which is characterized by reports of ego-diffusion. When asked to describe their experience of two personalities, they refer to a sense of ineptitude, frustration, anger, humiliation and withdrawal when trying to speak their second language. They attribute these feelings to their inability to find the correct words in which to express their thoughts and perhaps more importantly, words to express their feelings. The best example of this type comes from a young English student who received the highest score possible on ES. She says," I feel different because I am English speaking and I dislike Afrikaans. I cannot express myself nor can I understand Afrikaans properly. The change is only due to the fact that I cannot express myself properly."

It is important to note at this point that while there are indications that ES subjects may be poorer students of language in general (i.e., in both their own and their second language), language proficiency measures were not significantly related to report of ES in this study.

Protocols from this group contain descriptions of the experience of speaking a second language:

1. I feel stupid, uncultured, inferior or limited. I feel more superficial.
2. Lack of self-confidence and embarrassment.
3. Feelings of apprehension or anxiety.
4. Feeling of being literally tongue-tied, of groping for words, and of speaking more hesitantly with more pauses between words.
5. One subject said, "I am subdued." Another: "I speak softer so mistakes can't be heard." A third simply said, "I shut up," and another, "I shut off."

One might attribute all of these statements simply to lack of proficiency in the second language, similar to a lack of proficiency in any other cognitive area, but one keeps coming across hints that something else is involved. One English student wrote, "When I speak Afrikaans, I tend to feel cumbersome, awkward and inadequate. I feel frustrated and at times even an unpleasant patronizing feeling. In English I feel up to it, and comfortable, unless the subject matter is beyond me, and even then I don't feel as if I'm speaking Afrikaans." It is this partially unverbalizable sense of a qualitatively different sort of inadequacy which is tantalizing. Several subjects reported that they could not describe their feelings in words. When pressed, one girl said, "In English, my feet are rooted to the ground." A male subject said that he preferred to speak in Afrikaans because "in Afrikaans my blood runs faster."

Many of this group of subjects seem not to have conceptualized their inner discomfort in terms of two personalities or two identities. It is interesting to note that this type of person often reacts to the question, "Do you feel as if you have two separate personalities?" as if it has therapeutic value. Offering an explanation for a troubling and distressful inner experience seems to have the character of an insight of some importance in organizing that experience. Because such subjects may be highly suggestible, if this were the only type of ES reported, one might quite rightly suspect that experimenter effect was responsible for the results.

However, there is a second type of ES, which I have labeled the complete form, and which does not seem to manifest ego-diffusion, but results in two separate identities. It was talks with this type of bilingual which first suggested to me that this might be a fairly widespread phenomenon. There are several observations about this complete ES which seem noteworthy.

1) The subject is conscious of, and will spontaneously discuss, his sense of having two personalities.
2) The experience is reported as liberating or ego-expanding.

Rather than complaining of inadequacy, these subjects, matter-of-factly, tell of being able to express parts of themselves in one language which are unavailable to them in their other language.

One young Afrikaans woman said, "In Afrikaans I speak only dead-simply, without inflections of voice. In English I am more 'charming' and can express my feelings better. I think no one can be romantic in Afrikaans. The shift occurs especially when I am with boy friends. I just feel the situation can be more intimate when the discussion takes place in English." On the other hand, another subject says she feels more formal in English than Afrikaans. These two statements illustrate a puzzling aspect of ES. Subjects say that they feel freer or more inhibited, warmer or colder, in one of their languages, but it is not possible to predict with any degree of accuracy in <u>which</u> language the warmth or freedom will be felt. I suspect that this is a function of personality and child-rearing variables rather than properties of specific language pairings. One student says, "I am more outspoken in English and things don't sound so crude." Another who is from a bilingual home says, "In Afrikaans one usually feels more delighted and outgoing and at ease. English makes me feel placid, calm and introverted." A male subject from a bilingual home says, "In Afrikaans I am aggressive, boorish, hard. In English - soft, civilized, and compassionate."

The reports of two other subjects remind one of Jung's concept of the 'persona.' "In Afrikaans I feel like I'm putting on something," and "I feel as if I'm wearing a mask."

3) Experiencing ego-switch is accepted as perfectly normal. As one informant put it, "Of course I have two personalities. All bilinguals do."
4) Perhaps more importantly, these bilinguals seem to feel little or no anxiety about their experience of dual personality. They seem to have accepted the fact of two identities as both normal and liberating. They acknowledge the experience readily and say that other people who see them in action in both languages comment that their behavior is different depending on which language they are speaking.

Possible Explanations of the Phenomenon of Ego-Switch

There are several possible explanations for ES. The first is based purely on language proficiency - that is that ES is simply the sense of inadequate command of grammar and vocabulary in one language as compared to the sense of cognitive and communicative competence in the other language. However, as mentioned above, in the South African study, this seems not to have been operative. In addition, among those subjects from bilingual homes where one language was spoken with one parent and the other language with the other parent, a language-learning context which has been presumed by psycholinguists to be most nearly equal, there was a higher number reporting ES than in the population as a whole (i.e., 77% as compared to 60%).

The second explanation is the cultural or social psychological one, whereby the individual is, by means of the second language, interacting in a different social milieu and assuming a different set of roles. The assumption is that his perception of self is thereby altered enough so that he feels himself to have a second personality. Due to the difficulties of experimentally separating language and culture variables, this explanation has not been tested satisfactorily. I would offer one personal bit of evidence against it, however. In twenty years of experience in bilingual and bicultural situations, I never heard monolingual people who were functioning in a strange social environment, speak about a qualitative, subjective, non-verbal sense of personality switch. Monolinguals obviously are under stress under such conditions, but they do not seem to report the same sense of dual identity.

In looking elsewhere for clues to an explanation, it was noticed that people who report ES seem to be more tuned in to the paralinguistics of a language than are those who do not report ES. They seem in some way to respond more to body cues in themselves and in others than do non-ESs. It was this observation which led to the forming of the hypothesis for the South African study. The original hypothesis was that ES is a function of changes in kinesthetic and proprioceptive feedback produced by changes in paralinguistic phenomena, particularly changes in gesturing, as the subject switches from speaking one language to the other.

The statistical results indicate the following correlates of ES. The ES person is apt to be:

1) female
2) introverted (as measured by the EPI)
3) score higher on the EPI neuroticism scale
4) more apt to report that he uses gestures differently and has different voice qualities in his two languages.

In addition, the ES subject shows a different patterning of body awareness than does the non-ES subject. There was also an extremely significant difference in the means of the two culture groups on total body awareness - Afrikaans students as a group being much more aware than the English culture group.

Before suggesting a possible theoretical explanation for ES, I would like to describe two subjects more fully to illustrate several other facets of the phenomenon of ES. The first subject was a student at Rand Afrikaans University, who said he spoke Arikaans about 75% of the time, and reported that he could think in both languages. His answers to a number of questions indicated that

he was functioning well in both cultures. His matriculation grades and his self-ratings of bilingualism put him in the high average range of language proficiency. He showed the typical ES test score pattern on the EPI and body awareness. In answer to how he felt differently in the two languages, he said," In English I feel as if I am in a strange world." His home background indicated that he always spoke Afrikaans with his mother, siblings and grandparents, but he spoke English with his father. According to his self-report he could not dream in English. One must ask what it means for the psychic life of a male child when he does not dream (or perhaps cannot remember dreaming?) in a language he uses for communicating with his father.

The second subject is a young woman of very similar background and experience. She, too, had an English-speaking father and spoke Afrikaans with the rest of her family. In answer to the same question, she said," With my father I speak better when speaking English. If I speak Afrikaans to my mom, I feel I'm moving away from my dad." But in contrast to the male subject, she reports dreaming in both languages. She shows the same patterning of body awareness as the male subject, but she is above the norm on extraversion and below the norm on neuroticism.

I would like to return now to the beginning when I mentioned the need for the development of self-constancy. What are some of the factors which might, for the bilingual, impede reciprocal or symmetrical transformations of self, and which might therefore hinder him in the development of self-constancy?

Modes of Language Use: Elaborated and Restricted

Bernstein (1964) suggests that there are two modes of language use, elaborated and restricted, and says that they develop out of specific types of child-rearing practices. Elaborated language is highly differentiated grammatically and syntactically, and its user is able to symbolize and to represent verbally, fine distinctions in cognition and affect. This mode gives to the linguistic channel the full weight of both cognitive and affective functioning and produces for the speaker characteristic and expected auditory feedback.

Restricted language, on the other hand, is less syntactically complex, less grammatically 'correct,' and less semantically rich. The function of this mode is not to allow for expressing expanding individual differentiation, but to communicate and reinforce the normative social relationships of the speaker's community. It places a large part of emotional communication outside the linguistic channel altogether. It is a multi-channeled method of communicating. Transformations from one channel to the other are complex and behavioral outcomes are different for the two modes.

If the bilingual uses one language in a restricted fashion and the other in an elaborated fashion, the effect of such variation in communcation channels would be to cause changes in feedback. Since each language systematically and automatically produces certain types of predictable feedback, the subjective phenomenological transformations of this feedback might take on the characteristics of two different self-systems. Perceiving self-constancy in either affect or cognition under these conditions could very well be complex.

Compound and Coordinate Bilingualism

A number of psycholinguistic studies have made use of a distinction between two varieties of bilingualism. Simplistically, the compound bilingual is said to have one semantic system which is available through each of his two languages. For this type of bilingual, one would expect to find symmetry and reciprocity in language transformations and a high degree of self-constancy.

The coordinate bilingual, on the other hand, is said to have two separate semantic systems which are probably structurally different. There is even data to suggest that these systems are separately stored neurologically (Lambert and Fillenbaum, 1962). Depending on personal history, the coordinate bilingual may or may not function cognitively equally well within each system. And emotion may or may not be expressible equally in either language. It seems likely that it would be more difficult for the coordinate bilingual than for the compound bilingual to integrate into one self-system, the transformations precipitated by such language switching.

Integration of Speech and Kinesic Channels of Communication

Freedman and his colleagues (1972, 1967) report studies of the speech and kinesic channels of communication and how they facilitate or impede each other. They have found that certain types of hand movements which they term speech-primacy movements are closely geared in and subordinate to the rhythm and communicative meaning of the speech channel. Other movements, called motor-primacy movements, are used instead of words to encode or to symbolize meaning. Freedman implies that the kinesic channel may be primary in much of the symbolizing process. In order for an inchoate feeling, image or thought to be communicated first of all to one's self, it must be represented in some fashion that is separate from the individual. Perhaps it is ontologically simpler to separate the idea from the self by 'putting it outside' the body by means of a hand or other body movement.

The individual is then kinesthetically separating the inchoate idea from the body 'interior' and 'depositing' it into time and space. There it can be looked at by another person, and can be felt kinesthetically by the speaker. Freedman suggests that some such process facilitates linguistic symbol representation and is part of all linguistic functioning.

Ego-switch as a Function of Feedback Variation

Do the above discussed factors combine to produce a theoretical explanation for the bilingual's report of dual personality? Numerous psycho- and sociolinguistic studies show that bilinguals have unequal cognitive and affective differentiation in their two languages (Diebold, 1968) and that the more differentiated language is usually the preferred language. If Mahl (1972) is correct, self-constancy or a sense of identity is at least partly maintained by the individual's typical level of auditory and other organismic feedback, to typify for the bilingual his normal self, and to define for him his normal personality functioning. He will use the speech channel, to the optimal degree typical for him, for symbol representation and communication, and this will be reflected in his customary ratio of speech-primacy to motor-primacy hand movement.

When he switches to his less differentiated and less preferred language, the speech-primacy/motor-primacy ratio would change. Less differentiation would be reflected in more hand movements being used to encode meaning, that is, motor primacy movements would increase. As these movements increased, there would be decreased auditory feedback due to longer pauses and the silent kinesic encoding. In short, the linguistic channel would be less used for symbolization. A recent study by Grand and Marcos (1977) also indicates that there would be differences between languages in another type of speech-accompanied hand movement, namely self-touching.

All of these changes would be slight, but if they were of a systematic nature and perceived only when languages were switched, the bilingual might come subjectively to assign the two types of feedback to two different identities. Depending on a number of socio-economic, cultural and personality conditions, he would place different values and thus different affect on the two personalities. These factors would probably also play a part in whether or not he denied or was conscious of the phenomenon.

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